

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

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TAGS: PFOR, TS

SUBJ: DEROGATORY "LE MODE DIPLOMATIQUE" ARTICLE AND
TUNISIAN REACTION

REF : TUNIS 7494

SUMMARY: AS EXPECTED, GOT BLOCKED CIRCULATION OF DECEMBER
ISSUE OF "LE MODE DIPLOMATIQUE" WHICH CONTAINED LENGTHY,
HIGHLY DEROGATORY ARTICLE ON TUNISIA. GOT HAS BLOCKED
CIRCULATION OF DAILY "LE MONDE" AS WELL IN APPARENT
RETALIATION. GOVERNMENT EXPLAINED ACTION TO PUBLIC VIA
ARTICLE IN DESTOURIAN SOCIALIST PARTY (PSD) MAGAZINE BY
NOTING IRRESPONSIBILITY OF "LE MONDE DIPLOMATIQUE'S" BRAND
OF JOURNALISM AND INTIMATING THAT ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED
AFTER "LE MONDE" RECEIVED PAY-OFF. IN PRIVATE, GOT
OFFICIALS ASSERT THAT "LE MONDE" RECEIVED LARGE PAY-OFF
FROM ALGERIA FOR PUBLISHING ARTICLE. DESPITE BLOCKING
OF "LE MONDE DIPLOMATIQUE, WELL-INFORMED TUNISIANS HAVE
CIRCULATED ARTICLE AMONG THEMSELVES. THEY DO NOT IN GENERAL
SYMPATHIZE WITH ITS VIEW OF TUNISIA, BUT THEY ARE PROBABLY
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LIKEWISE UNSYMPATHETIC WITH GOVERNMENT'S CONTINUED BLOCKING

OF "LE MONDE," THEIR MOST POPULAR OUTSIDE SOURCE OF
INTERNATIONAL NEWS. END SUMMARY.

1. AS WAS ANTICIPATED, GOT BLOCKED DECEMBER ISSUE OF
"LE MONDE DIPLOMATIQUE" WHICH CONTAINED FOUR PAGE ARTICLE
ON TUNISIA REVIEWING CURRENT GOT ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND
SOCIAL POLICY. ARTICLE CALLED GOT INDUSTRIAL POLICY A
"SELL-OUT" TO FOREIGN INTERESTS AND AGRICULTURAL POLICY A
"VICTORY OF THE KULAKS;" CLAIMED THAT THE EDUCATION SYSTEM
WAS BECOMING THE PRESERVE OF THE PRIVILEGED CLASSES;
DESCRIBED POLITICAL REPRESSION UNDER THE HEADLINE "SHADES
OF CHILE;" AND FINISHED BY PICTURING BOURGUIBA AS PREOCCUPIED
ONLY WITH GLORIFYING HIS "HISTORICAL GENIUS" AND HIS AIDES
AS ENRICHING THEMSELVES VIA SPECULATION AND CORRUPT DEALS.
THE ARTICLE CLOSES WITH A PAEAN TO AHMED BEN SALAH, CALLING
HIM TUNISIA'S ONLY POLITICAL FIGURE WITH IDEAS AND MEN TO
SERVE AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO GOT'S CURRENT, "EVIL" POLICIES.
THE ARTICLE IS CLEARLY A PRO-BEN SALAH POLEMIC AND IT MAKES
NO ATTEMPT TO EVALUATE OBJECTIVELY THE RELATIVE ACHIEVEMENTS
OF CURRENT GOT POLICY COMPARED TO GOT PERFORMANCE IN THE
1960'S WHEN BEN SALAH WAS IN POWER.

2. GOT REACTION TO "LE MONDE DIPLOMATIQUE" ARTICLE HAS BEEN
SEVERE. THE DAILY "LE MONDE" HAS BEEN BLOCKED FROM TUNISIA
SINCE MID-DECEMBER IN RETALIATION FOR THE DEROGATORY ARTICLE.
IN A DECEMBER 22 ARTICLE IN PSD WEEKLY "DIALOUGE," THE PARTY
INFORMED PUBLIC OF THE DECISION TO BLOCK "LE MONDE" AND
JUSTIFIED THIS MOVE ON THE GROUNDS OF IRRESPONSIBLE JOURNALISM.
"DIALOUGE" ALSO INTIMATED THAT "LE MONDE DIPLOMATIQUE" HAD
PRINTED THE ARTICLE IN RETURN FOR A FINANCIAL PAY-OFF. IN
PRIVATE, GOT LEADERS OPENLY ACCUSE ALGERIA OF INSPIRING AND
FINANCING THE ARTICLE AND CONNECT IT TO RECENT DETERIORATION
OF ALGERIAN-TUNISIAN RELATIONS AND ALGERIAN SUPPORT FOR
TUNISIAN POLITICAL OPPOSITION. ALGERIAN CONNECTIONS OF
ARTICLE'S AUTHORS HAVE BEEN NOTED PUBLICLY IN SEMI-OFFICIAL
PRESS.

3. DESPITE BLOCKING OF "LE MONDE DIPLOMATIQUE," WELL-INFORMED
TUNISIANS HAVE HAD ACCESS TO THE DECEMBER ARTICLE VIA
BOOTLEGGED COPIES. EMBASSY CONTACTS ACQUAINTED WITH ARTICLE,
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INCLUDING SOME WHO CREDIT ACCURACY OF CERTAIN UNPLEASANT
FACTS WHICH ARTICLE RETAILS, CONSIDER THE ARTICLE ONE-SIDED
AND IRRESPONSIBLE. MANY BELIEVE GOT WOULD HAVE DONE BETTER
TO IGNORE IT, RATHER THAN TO EMPHASIZE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF
ITS CONTENTS BY PROHIBITING ITS CIRCULATIONS. IN THIS VEIN,
INFORMATION MINISTER MASMOUDE WAS OPENLY CRITICIZED, AT A
YEAR'S END MEETING WITH THE ENTIRE PRESS CORPS, BY TUNISIAN
JOURNALISTS WHO SAW AN OPEN INFORMATION POLICY AS GOT'S

BEST DEFENSE. THEY SAID THE TUNISIAN PRESS IS COMPETENT TO RESPOND SUCCESSFULLY TO HOSTILE FOREIGN CHARGES, AND ASKED WHY FOREIGN NEWSPAPERS SOMETIMES GET TUNISIAN STORIES WHICH THE LOCAL PRESS IS DENIED.

4. TUNISIANS ARE ALSO CRITICAL OF THE GOT'S BLOCKING OF THE DAILY "LE MONDE" WHICH, WITH ITS PROBABLE CIRCULATION OF ABOUT 10,000, WAS THE MOST POPULAR OUTSIDE SOURCE OF NEWS AND OPINION FOR TUNISIANS. "LE MONDE," HOWEVER, HAS LONG BEEN AN OCCASIONAL IRRITANT TO GOT LEADERSHIP AS IT HAS PRINTED VERSIONS OF TUNISIAN TRIALS AND STRIKES AT ODDS WITH GOT INFORMATION POLICY. THE PSD DIRECTOR WAS RELIABLY QUOTED, PRIOR TO THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE BAN ON "LE MONDE," MUSING AS TO WHY THE NEWSPAPER HAD BECOME SO LEFTIST-ORIENTED AND THUS SO HOSTILE TO TUNISIA. IT MAY BE A LONG TIME BEFORE "LE MONDE" APPEARS AGAIN IN THE COFFEE SHOPS OF TUNIS.
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